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# THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

## FEBRUARY, 1907

### PLAN FOR OFFICIAL ADVISORY ORGANIZATION OF THE TEACHING FORCE OF CHICAGO<sup>1</sup>

REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO, APPOINTED TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION AND REPORT UPON THE WHOLE SUBJECT OF AN ADVISORY ORGANIZATION OF THE TEACHING BODY, SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AT ITS MEETING, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1906

*To the School Management Committee of the Board of Education of the City of Chicago:*

Your subcommittee appointed to take into consideration and report upon the whole subject of an advisory organization of the teaching body respectfully reports as follows:

I. Your committee finds that under existing conditions the Board of Education and the teaching body are as widely separated for consultative and freely co-operative purposes as if they had no educational interests or duty in common. For the teachers are inarticulate as a body, and the board, compelled to act without their direct advice and only upon reports of official intermediaries, is forced into the position of governing by the mere right of its legal authority and often in ignorance of matters regarding which the teachers would be its best advisers. This is manifestly detrimental. It tends especially to lessen the effectiveness of the teachers in their school-work, by destroying in them that spirit of co-operation which is vital to a homogeneous school system.

<sup>1</sup> From the *Chicago Teachers' Federation Bulletin*, January 4, 1907.

II. Even if it were true that all goodness and wisdom in affairs educational dwell in the school authorities, the fact remains that in the end their decrees must be executed by the teachers. It is the teachers, after all, and not boards, committees, or superintendents, that must be depended upon to give vitality to public-school education. Their cordial co-operation is therefore essential.

And inasmuch as teachers are neither soulless machines to be despotically manipulated by masterhands, nor soldiers with no other function than unquestioning obedience, nor mechanical producers of the inanimate commodities of the factory, but are the personal guardians and guides of the children they teach, and come into more intimate relations with these wards of the public school than anyone else in the system, their hearty and intelligent co-operation in promoting the educational policies of the board is not to be secured by methods of management which are or seem to them to be despotic. If they feel the weight of despotic hands, the less assertive among them will cringe in their official intercourse with superiors in authority, and be despotic in turn in their official intercourse with subordinates. Thus perpetuating itself, the despotic or decree-promulgating policy must inevitably react upon the pupils, tending to turn some of them into little learning machines and others into little rebels, instead of making eager students of all.

In the opinion of your committee, the teaching force must be sympathetically considered and trusted. If they are to do their best for the children, the teachers must be consulted about educational policies—not now and then and here and there, as real or apparent favorites of superiors in authority, but as a body of educators organically recognized by the board and its employees. Their cordial acquiescence in the wisdom, justice, and sincerity of the policies they are called upon to promote must be secured, or their work will fall short of its highest possibilities. In the nature of things, this acquiescence cannot be secured either by preventing discussion or by ignoring recommendations. To prevent discussion irritates; to ignore the results of discussion is disheartening. The important thing is not that the recom-

mentations of the teacher shall be adopted by the board regardless of their merits, but that they shall be considered in good faith upon their merits.

III. One of the most important steps, therefore, which, in the opinion of your committee, the board ought to take, is the organization of the teachers into an official consultative and advisory body.

There is no implication here, nor have we learned satisfactorily of any demand from any source, that the teaching body should govern the superintendent or the board, or in any manner dictate to either. What is in principle proposed is (1) that the responsibility of legislative authority and final control should be reposed in the board; (2) that the responsibility of administrative authority and advisory direction should be reposed in the superintendent; and (3) that advisory authority and responsibility on educational subjects, and the relation of the teaching body to the school system, should be vested in the teaching body. And the teaching body in its advisory capacity, should it be thus organized, should have the fullest parliamentary freedom of expression. The common-sense of the teachers, far better than arbitrary rules or decrees from their superiors, would soon indicate to them the proper limitations of subject-matter for their discussion.

IV. The value of such an organization is obvious. The lack of it is a manifest detriment to the school system in many ways.

In the matter of the selection of school readers, for example, we have already had an instructive exemplification of the unwisdom of not having an authorized method of securing the advice of the teaching body on important questions regarding the work in which they and the board are in common engaged. When authoritative pedagogical advice was needed on this subject, a recommendation by a jury of teachers selected by the superintendent, whose names were kept secret from the board, and whose verdict was transmitted by the superintendent with only perfunctory approval, was the only method available. In saying this we condemn no one. It was the result of a system which should be changed.

We regard an authoritative organization of the teachers for consultative and advisory purposes, with reference to pedagogical subjects and their own relation to the school system, as an immediate necessity for the best interests of the public-school children.

V. This idea of an official organization of the teaching force for advisory purposes has long been urged by the Chicago Teachers' Federation—one of the most useful civic and educational organizations of the city—as a fundamental method of harmonizing and increasing the efficiency of all parts of the school system. It was approved in principle in 1900 by the executive committee of one hundred citizens organized by another civic body of Chicago, the Civic Federation, in a recommendation of an advisory school faculty which should represent all grades of teachers, from principals to kindergarten teachers, by delegates chosen on some established basis. Its value is recognized by the educational committee of the Charter Convention. It has, moreover, had the approval of some of the most distinguished educators of the United States; not only such as are accounted radical, but also such as are accounted conservative.

VI. [NOTE BY THE EDITORS.—Section VI embodies quotations from the leading educational authorities in the country, showing the need for representation, and giving their sanction to it. This section is omitted from lack of space.]

VII. Your committee therefore recommends the adoption of the following resolutions:

WHEREAS, The full power and responsibility for legislative, judicial, and executive action within the school system, now reposed by law in the Board of Education, should be intelligently and faithfully maintained, and no part thereof should be surrendered to any employee or employees of the board; and,

WHEREAS, The superintendent ought to have full power and responsibility for executive administration on the educational side, as the servant of the board, together with advisory power and responsibility relative to all its legislative, executive, and judicial functions; and,

WHEREAS, The teaching force ought to be so organized

officially as to invest it with advisory power and responsibility relative to executive, judicial, and legislative action, whether upon its own initiative or in response to requests from the superintendent or the board; and,

WHEREAS, A realization of these principles in practice is necessary to secure the best service from the superintendent and the teaching force, and to enable the board to perform its functions in the most intelligent and effective manner; and,

WHEREAS, The superintendent's assistance and advice are already available to the board at all times, but the necessary organization of the teaching body remains yet to be effected;

Therefore, to the end that the advice of the teachers as well as that of the superintendent may be available, and that complete and cordial co-operation of the board, the superintendent, and the teaching body may may be thereby established;

*Resolved*, That "The Educational Councils" of the Chicago public schools be, and they are hereby, invited to submit to the Board of Education a revised constitution for the purpose of placing the teaching body of the Chicago public-school system into direct advisory relations with the board;

*Resolved*, That it is the sense of the Board of Education that the basic principles of such revision should be along the following lines:

1. All teachers and principals in actual service should be *ipso facto* members of the council of their respective schools.
2. District Councils and the Central Council should be formed by representation from the respective School Councils.
3. Provision should be made for advisory or other co-operation with the councils in their deliberations, of the superintendent and other officials on the educational side, analogous to that which exists between the superintendent and the board.
4. Provision should be made for separate expression of opinion and action when desired, on the part of the high-school councils, of elementary-school councils, of principals, of specialty instructors, and of the grade teachers and high-school teachers, as distinct departments of or bodies within the councils.
5. Rules of order should be adopted for convenient and

appropriate consideration and action by the councils upon any question for the purpose of advising the board, whether at the request of the board or upon their own initiative; and,

*Resolved*, That, pending the above suggested revision of their constitution, the aforesaid "The Educational Councils" be, and they are hereby, officially recognized by the Board of Education as an official advisory organization of the teaching body.

Respectfully submitted

CORNELIA D. DE BEY, M.D., *Chairman*